

## Night Of The Young Heavyweights: Hope & Questions

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Thursday, 25 September 2003 18:00

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On Saturday night September 27th, HBO will be broadcasting three heavyweight fights featuring six up and coming young heavyweights. I don't need to mention their names, that's not important right now. The question is, will any of these young hopefuls show the potential that they are capable of becoming a special fighter?

With the brilliant career of Heavyweight Champ Lennox Lewis winding down, it's almost impossible to watch an up and coming heavyweight and not wonder if this could be the guy. By the guy, I mean the fighter who can rule the most prestigious division in boxing. There can be no doubt right now that Lewis must be regarded as the best active heavyweight in the world. And no, it's not Vitali Klitschko. Although Vitali put up a gallant fight against Lewis, he didn't win or prove that he's the better fighter. Maybe Klitschko will have his day down the road, but right now Lewis is the man.

Regardless of what anyone says, the heavyweight division is boxings flagship division. Currently there are three big names in it, Lennox Lewis 38, Evander Holyfield who turns 41 in a couple weeks, and Mike Tyson 37. Unfortunately all three of them are just about history. Lewis will be gone within a year. Holyfield will continue to fight for who knows how long. Probably until some fighter gives him a total thrashing. I seriously doubt that fighter will be James Toney. The point with Holyfield is, only he believes that he can win the title again. That leaves Tyson. The problem with Tyson is that he just does not fight enough anymore, if at all. Tyson, like Holyfield is still a dangerous fight for any of the title belt holders, but history has shown that he is way past being a force in the heavyweight division.

Since Joe Louis beat James Braddock for the heavyweight title back in June of 1937, there have been exactly three non-heavyweight super stars who have carried boxings mantle. They are, Sugar Ray Robinson, Sugar Ray Leonard, and Oscar De La Hoya. They are the only non-heavyweight fighters who have attracted non boxing fans to follow or care about boxing.

So it's obvious that for boxing to thrive, it needs a dominant heavyweight champion. Or, it needs a non heavyweight fighter who is great and has charisma. With De La Hoya's loss to Mosley, it's doubtful that he'll be around much longer. As great as Roy Jones is, his unwillingness to seek out other great fighters and fights make him almost invisible to the fringe boxing fans.

Looking at boxings glamor division, who will be the man after Lewis? As noted earlier, it's not Holyfield or Tyson. So who does that leave? The Klitschko's, Byrd, Tua, Rahman, and Kirk Johnson, excluding the heavyweights fighting on September 27th.

Vitali Klitschko showed against Lewis that he's more than willing and tough enough, but is he ever going to capture the publics imagination or go on to achieve greatness? I don't think so. Wladimir Klitschko is very skilled, especially for a fighter who is 6'5". However, I have serious doubts about his beard. Chris Byrd is a terrific boxer, but Muhammad Ali was the only true

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super star heavyweight champ who wasn't a one punch knockout artist.

David Tua has the punch, but he doesn't keep his weight down. And he can be out-boxed by the top boxers in the division. Hasim Rahman and Kirk Johnson? Neither one of them does anything so special that boxing fans flock to see them, and both of them have let their weight balloon up. So with them, you never know what you are going to get!

With the night of the young heavyweights nearing, what should we look for in a fighter who we can possibly latch onto in hopes of him being the next "man" in the heavyweight division? For boxing fans to latch on to the next heavyweight great, one thing is certain. He must be a puncher!

Remember, since Joe Louis, there have been three great dominant heavyweight champions who were boxers. They are Muhammad Ali, Larry Holmes, and Evander Holyfield. Although Holyfield is thought of as a counter-puncher, he's much closer to being a boxer than a puncher. And as great as Holmes and Holyfield were, they both needed a dance partner to be a draw. Ali was the only true world super star heavyweight champ who wasn't a seek and destroy puncher! No doubt, the next great heavyweight to carry boxing's mantle must be a big puncher.

Now that we have that clear, what else do we need to see? I believe the next star heavyweight must show us that he is obsessed with boxing and becoming a great fighter. And he must be willing to fight anybody. He must have some size, but doesn't have to be a giant! As long as he weighs about 220 and is 6'1" , that's plenty big enough. It would help if he had a good jab, as most fight people know, everything works off of it. He doesn't have to have the speed of Ali, but he can't be slow and plodding. Speed in the heavyweight division is a huge plus!

Stamina is a given, he will go no where if he's only good for three or four rounds like Shannon Briggs. He also must be a smart boxer and have good basics. Although he doesn't have to be Holmes, the basics are an absolute must. To be an outstanding heavyweight, he must throw punches and not constantly look for one punch. It also would not hurt if he is capable of fighting all three minutes of every round. And lastly, he must have a sturdy chin.

In the heavyweight division, having a solid chin is more imperative than it is in any other division! It doesn't matter if you're as fast as Ali, can box like Holmes, or hit like Foreman. The fact is that somewhere along the line in the heavyweight division, a fighter is going to get nailed. How he holds up and reacts to that will go a long way in determining if he is capable of ever being a major force in the division. Speaking of having a good chin, heart and character are also a definitive trait in determining how far a fighter will go. And it's something that all fans can see and respect!

So heres wishing the best of luck to Juan Carlos Gomez, Sinan Samil, Dominick Guinn, Duncan Dokiwari, Joe Mesi, and Davarryl Williamson. Maybe one of these heavyweights will go on to be the future of the division? Only time will tell.

The biggest sure thing of the night is this. The fighter who emerges as the front runner of the six heavyweights on September 27th, will be assured of more HBO dates down the road.

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However, you can bet my life on it, the contract will have two major clauses in it. And it will read something like this.....HBO reserves the right to drop your ass if you lose anytime before the contract expires, and we have the final say on accepting or rejecting your future opponents! Welcome to the HBO family and the era of Network controlled Boxing!